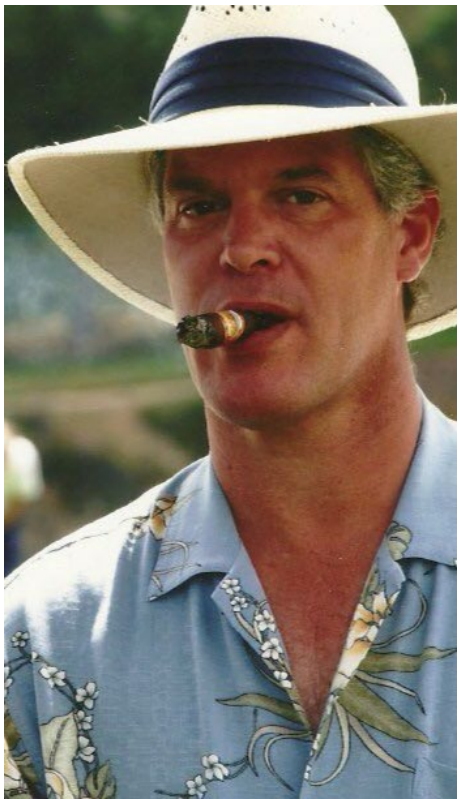
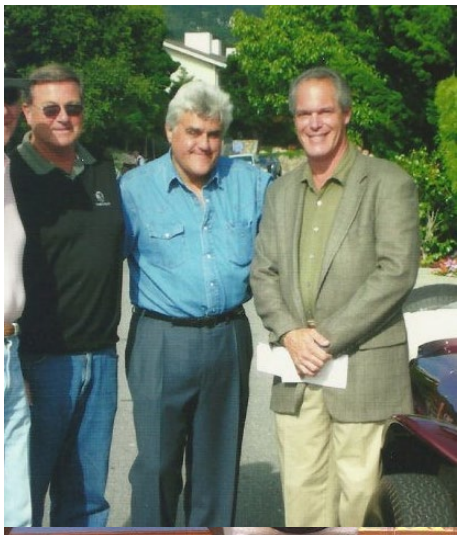
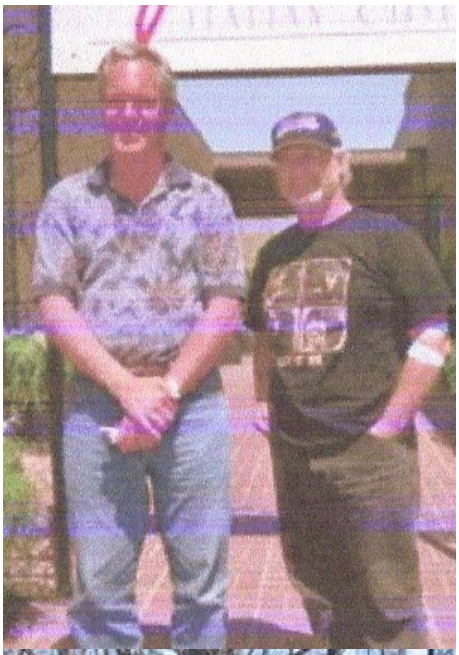
Steven Kunes

Author, Screenwriter, Playwright, Executive Producer







Steven Kunes was born on September 7, 1956 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and attended New York University where he received B.A. degrees in Creative Writing and Comparative Literature in 1978.

After much success writing short stories and non-fiction articles for national publications, TV legend Norman Lear hired Kunes to write and develop half-hour comedies for his company, Embassy Television. This led to assignments in the areas on one-hour TV, movies-of-the-week, a five-year stint writing monologues for Johnny Carson, and eventually to motion pictures, where Kunes became one of Hollywood's most successful (albeit unknown) script doctors, working on eleven of the most popular films in the last three decades.

Presently, Kunes is the creator and executive producer of "Over My Dead Body," an original comedy series now showing on Amazon Prime. In 2018, his novel "Uncle Jerry to Win," his collection of plays "Four on the Floor: Four Plays," and his collection of screenplays "Pick Six: Six Screenplays" were all published by Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company. Kunes divides his time between Los Angeles and Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Steven Kunes
(818) 927-3442

steve@stevenkunes.com

www.overmydeadbody.tv

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Resume

Education:

New York University, 1978, Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing & Comparative Literature (double concentration, summa cum laude, 3.92 GPA).

Guest Lecturer:

The Lear Center/USC (2012-2013), New York University (2005-Present), Pepperdine University (2003).

Motion Pictures:

Current Screen Projects: "Door Number Three" (Heyday Films/Warner Bros. Pictures).

Produced Screen Projects (Uncredited Participating Writer/Script Doctor): "The Theory of Everything" (2014), "Atlas Shrugged: Part I" (2011), "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" (2009), "Catch Me If You Can" (2002), "Legally Blonde" (2001), "Cast Away" (2000), "Wag the Dog" (1997), "Groundhog Day" (1993), "The Pelican Brief" (1993), "Ghost" (1990), "Rain Man" (1988).

Unproduced Screen Projects: "Where Is Joe Merchant?" (2006/Shimon Arama/Warners), "Restoration" (2006/Warners), "Clock Without Hands" (2000/Miramax), "Acquitted" (1999/Warners), "Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant" (1992/Tri-Star), "The Linderman Pyramid" (1992/Touchstone), "First Comes Love" (1992/Fox), "Rum Runners" (1988/Amblin'/Universal), "Bonds That Tie" (1985/Columbia), "The Windows of Richard Allen"

(1984/Paramount), "Seascape" (1982/Gil Evans), "Second of Four" (1979), "The Graduate: Part Two" (1978/Turman-Foster Productions).

Stage:

"Then Again" (2016), premiered on October 4, 2016 at Theatre West, Los Angeles, California.

"Captain of a Lost Ship" (2012), workshop and staged reading at McCarter Theatre, Princeton, New Jersey.

"Hopeless Romantic" (2010), permiered on August 14, 2010 at Center Stage Theater, Santa Barbara, California.

"Clock Without Hands" (2007), based on the last novel by Carson McCullers, and incorporating notes from her close friend Tennessee Williams. Performed in workshop at The Roundabout Theatre, New York City.

Musical Theater:

"Singer!" (1979), a treatment for a Broadway musical based on the life and times of Isaac Merritt Singer, the man who made famous (and appropriated) the sewing machine which was actually invented by Elias Howe.

Television:

Current Television Projects: "Over My Dead Body" (original comedy series for Amazon Prime).

Half-Hour Pilots: "Coral Gables" (Falcon Productions/Univision), "Is There a Lawyer in the House?" (Ron Dunas Productions/CBS), "About Luis" (Viacom Productions/CBS), "Ms. Liberty" (Grosso-Jacobson Productions/CBS), "Jackson & Friends" (Centerpoint Productions/ABC), "The Masque Raiders" (American Greetings Productions/ABC), "P.O.P." and "Good Evening, He Lied" (Embassy TV/Norman Lear/NBC).

One-Hour Pilots: "N.O.R.S.A.T." (A. Shane Company/Robert Conrad/NBC), "Hittin' Home" (Michael Krauss Productions-Viacom/Synd.).

Half-Hour Episodic: "South Park" (staff-Comedy Central), "Out of This World" (staff-Synd.), "The Wonder Years" (ABC), "Trial & Error" (ABC), "Mr. President" (staff-FOX), "What's Happening Now" (Synd.), "Marblehead Manor" (Synd.), "Small Wonder" (Synd.), "Kate & Allie" (CBS), "Family Ties" (staff-NBC), "Cheers" (staff-NBC), "Webster" (ABC), "aka Pablo" (staff-ABC).

One-Hour Episodic: "thirtysomething" (staff-ABC), "High

Mountain Rangers" (ABC), "Our House" (NBC), "Charley Hannah" (ABC), "Stir Crazy" (CBS), "Love Boat" (ABC), "Moonlighting" (staff-ABC).

Movies-of-the-Week: "Final Approach" (Edgar Sherick Productions/CBS), "Revenge from the Shadows" (Helios Productions/NBC), "Stolen Love" (Palone Company/ABC).

Afterschool Specials: "Split Ends" (Ruby-Spears Productions/ABC), "My Mother Was Never a Kid" (Hallmark/ABC).

Prime-Time Specials: "Salute to America's Pets" (Bob Hope Entertainment/NBC), "The Magical World of Disney" (Andrew Solt Productions/NBC), "Alvin Goes Back 2 School: NBC's Saturday Morning Kick-Off Special" (Helios Productions/NBC).

Comedy/Variety: "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" (staff-Carson Productions/NBC).

Spec Scripts: "Hill Street Blues," "Taxi," "M*A*S*H," "Barney Miller."

Stand-Up Comedy Material & Sketches: Johnny Carson, Rodney Dangerfield, Chris Rock, Roseanne Barr, Larry Miller, Richard Jeni, Dennis Wolfberg, Kathy Najimy & Mo Gaffney ("Kathy & Mo"), Paul Rodriguez.

Overall Deals: Viacom Productions, Embassy Television (Norman Lear).

Books:

"Hopeless Romantic: a play" (Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company, 2019), "Uncle Jerry to Win: a novel" (Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company, 2018), "Four on the Floor: Four Plays" (Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company, 2018), "Pick Six: Six Screenplays" (Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company, 2018), "Benedictis" (unpublished, 1983).

Short Stories:

"The Making of a Heart Surgeon," "Ashes," "The Wee Road," "The Scholarship," "The Mixologist-in-Residence," "Into the Fire," "The Audition."

Essays:

"Who the Experts Were," "Survivor in the Classroom," "Teachers Deserve Our Respect," "No Forwarding Address," "My Grandmother's Legacy," "Lost & Found," "Saving My Dog Rosie," "The Not-So-Ugly Duckling," "A Writer in the

Family," "September, 1976," "Talk of the Town" (3), "About Men" (2).

Articles:

"The Linderman Pyramid," "The Empire State Building Turns 50," "Wife/Mistress," "The Money Debt," "There's a Bit of Bucks County in New York."

Interviews:

Jimmy Buffett, Martin Herskovitz (Malibu D.A.), L.A. County Sheriff Leroy D. Baca, Hal Linden, Milos Forman, Johnny Carson, Dustin Hoffman.

Subject of Interviews:

Los Angeles Times (2016), Santa Barbara News-Press (2010), Bucks County Courier Times (2016, 1988, 1985 and 1969).

Advertising:

Jantzen Sportswear (1982), Greyhound (1982).

Web Content:

MyGlobalClassroom (2000-Present).

Events:

"Laurence/2000 Turns 40" (1993), "Tony Randall Celebrity Love Roast at Radio City Music Hall" (1979).

Publications:

"Vanity Fair," "The Santa Barbara News-Press," "The Santa Barbara Independent," "The Santa Barbara Daily Sound," "The Malibu Surfside News," "The Malibu Times," "The New Yorker," "The Atlantic Monthly," "New York Times Sunday Magazine," "The Saturday Evening Post," "Playboy," "Penthouse," "Gallery," "Woman's Day," "Woman's World," "Self," "The Dial," "Video Review," "The Bucks County Courier Times," "New York Quarterly," "The Minetta Review," "High Times."

Awards:

City of Santa Barbara Annual Awards (2010/"Letter of Recognition from the Mayor"), Social Venture Partners of Silicon Valley's iMagine Award (2007/"Great Books e-Curriculum"), Greater Los Angeles Press Award (2006/"The Not-So-Ugly Duckling"), Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Humanitarian Award (2005/"Antelope Valley Fallen Heroes"), National Stuttering Foundation's Laura Pels

Award (2005/"Story Reading Coordinator"), Children's Hospital of Los Angeles' Vivian Sheehan Award (2004/"Everybody's in the Book: Kids Writing Program"), Valley International Film Festival's Vision Award for Writing (2004/"Rain Man"), International Distance Learning Center's Helping Hand Award (2003/"MyGlobalClassroom"), Writers Guild of America's William E. Kelley Award for Hollywood's Top Ten Unproduced Screenplays (2003/"Acquitted"), Emmy Award (1992/"The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson"), PTA's Endurance Award (1988/"The Wonder Years"), NYU's William Faulkner Award for Short Fiction (1978/"The Mixologist-in-Residence").

Affiliations:

Writers Guild of America, Authors Guild, Dramatists Guild, PEN America, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (Oscars), Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (Emmys), Social Venture Partners of Silicon Valley, Santa Barbara Museum of Art: Director's Circle, New York University Alumni Association, Who's Who in Entertainment, Save the Manatee Foundation, AARP.

Charities:

Founder and Chairman of MyGlobalClassroom, a California non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. Our international resource center provides, free of charge via the worldwide web and satellite broadband, access to a comprehensive K-12 education, including a vast enrichment curriculum, to underprivileged children around the world. Fundraiser and Instructor at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles' Kids Writing Program. Fundraiser and Volunteer for Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (raised funds for the Antelope Valley Fallen Heroes campaign and the 1999 L.A.S.D. Rose Parade float in Pasadena, California). Special Sponsor of The 2005 Malibu Arts Festival: KidzArt Program. Advisory Boardmember (2008-2010) of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary of Santa Barbara, California. Contributor to the Dramatists Guild Foundation: Write Stuff Society, Save the Manatee Foundation, the Turtle Rescue Mission of Montecito, California, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and Heal the Bay.

Interests:

Electronic publishing, books by Audrey Niffenegger, the works of Tennessee Williams, amateur "ham" radio (KQ6DF, formerly WA3MZV), Annual Vintage Automobile Show at Pebble Beach's Concours d'Elegance, California wines, Key West Cigar Factory, Lorelei the manatee, traveling with my children to distant lands.

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Books

Uncle Jerry To Win

In 1987, author Steven Kunes began his morning visits to the Alfred Coffee Shop on Melrose Place in L.A. He soon found himself seated within earshot of a regular group of aspiring young actresses...and couldn't believe the things he overheard. It didn't take long for Kunes to make notes of these conversations, which he did in a composition book that he carried specifically for this mission.

Over time, one at a time the actresses would disappear, only to be replaced by a new Hollywood arrival. When one composition book was filled, Kunes began another -- and in 1992 these journals would be packed in a box and then sit in an attic for the next 25 years.

When they popped up in the fall of 2017 during a move, Kunes decided to fashion a narrative from some of what was documented, and "Uncle Jerry to Win" is a result of that effort.

Much has changed in the last three decades, and what appears in these pages may seem of little relevance in our virtual daily lives. However, frozen moments in time are the real precious jewels in this world, according to Robert Frost. In that spirit, get ready for an interesting ride.

"This is an exceptional work of literature by a storyteller at the absolute top of his game."

-- Anne Tyler

Four on the Floor

"Four on the Floor" is a collection of four stage plays by author and screenwriter Steven Kunes.

In "Hopeless Romantic," a famous author goes to the airport and finds himself seated beside an unknown woman who is reading his latest book. Should she speak to him? What will she say?

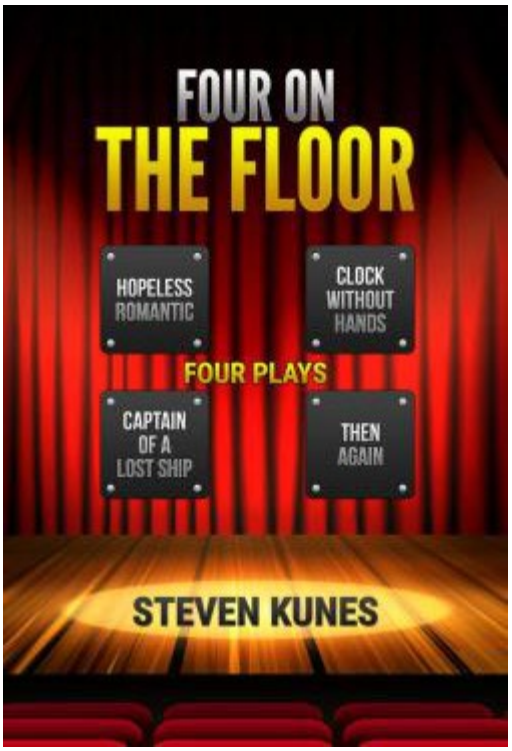
"Clock Without Hands" is the long-awaited adaptation of Carson McCullers' final novel and incorporates recently-discovered story notes given to he by best friend Tennessee Williams.

"Captain of a Lost Ship" tells the story of a teenage boy who offsets physical abuse and the squalor of his own family life by retreating into a fantasy world that allows him to "do what is necessary" to provide one good Christmas for him mom and siblings.

"Then Again" sets its sights on two lost souls, Eleanor and Ted, who heal their fractured lives by stepping into the personas of Ania and Sam -- two immigrants at the turn of the century. In so doing, they prove Winston Churchill's admonition that "...the farther we look into the past, the farther we see into the future."

"Each play is well-realized...intelligent, funny, poignant and stirs the imagination."

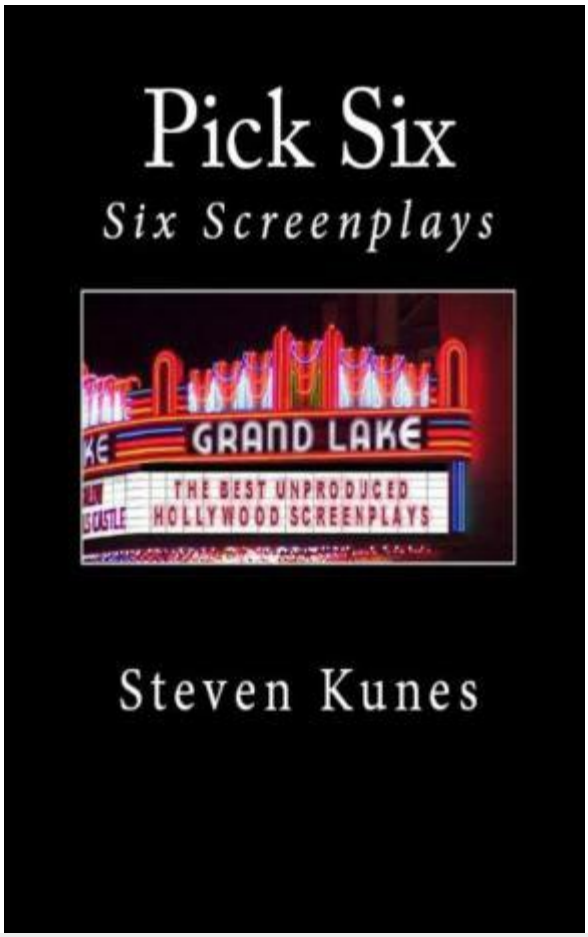
-- Terrence McNally



Pick Six: Six Screenplays

Written by author and screenwriter Steven Kunes over the last three decades, these six screenplays (consisting of three originals and three adaptations) were sold to the major studios but eventually landed in "turnaround" -- the term used for Hollywood hell where ninety-percent of all scripts end up. Nonetheless, these works stand out among the industry's finest motion picture scripts. One of them, "Acquitted," won the 2004 William E. Kelley Award as the best unproduced screenplay in Hollywood, and is currently included in the screenwriting curriculum at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

"These scripts are uniquely different from each other...and each is a masterpiece in its own way." -- Jeff Arch, screenwriter of "Sleepless In Seattle."


Pick Six
Six Screenplays
GRAND LAKE
THE BEST UNPRODUCED
HOLLYWOOD SCREENPLAYS
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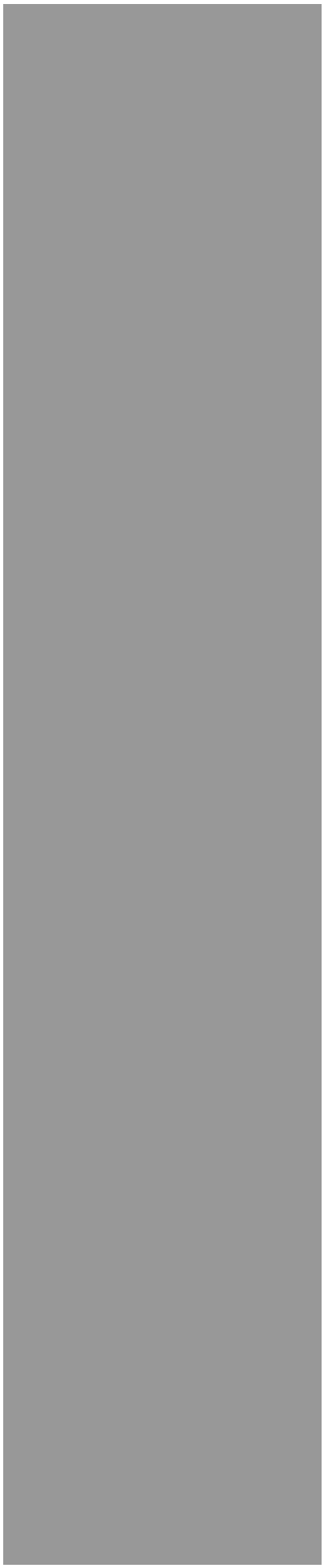
Tennessee Williams Typewriter

11/20/2007

The Death and Funeral of Tennessee Williams

by John H. Sime

It is often thought that death communicates its coming. Grief experts tell us that even those who do not commit suicide, or do not die from lingering illness, but instead die quickly, unexpectedly in accidents or of heart attacks, sometimes can be seen in retrospect to have made efforts to tie up loose ends. This was the case with playwright Tennessee Williams. A few months before his death, a young writer named **Steven Kunes** and his wife met a friendly old man in a roadside bar in Florida. They talked



together about writing for some time before the old man finally introduced himself as Tennessee Williams. The couple gave him a ride back to his house in Key West where they continued the conversation. Suddenly, Williams left the room and returned with a battered Underwood typewriter.

"I write very rarely on this anymore," Williams said to Steven. "But I used it for 'Summer and Smoke' and 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'. It needs a new ribbon, and perhaps some oil. I didn't know I'd be finding a place for it so soon. Write a play, Steven. Just write a play. I know you can hit the core. I know it like I know a good wine. Don't be flattered when I say this. You can flatter me by using this old machine here to do the job." Three months later, **Kunes** sent Williams a rough draft of his play, ***"Hopeless Romantic."*** He never received a reply. Two months after that, Williams was dead.

A world-class hypochondriac most of his adult life, Williams regularly told friends for the last 30 years of his life that he was dying of heart trouble, or a brain tumor, or cancer. Yet the autopsy performed on his 71-year-old body after his death in February, 1983 revealed a constitution remarkably free of the effects of decades of alcoholism, drug abuse, and sexual extravagance. The cause of death was determined to be asphyxia. He choked to death on the cap from a bottle of Visine eye drops, which he apparently had tried to administer to himself while in a bed in the penthouse suite of New York City's Elysee Hotel. While blood tests indicated considerable amounts of alcohol, cocaine, and other drugs in his system, this was not an unusual condition for Williams.

Death was long sought and contemplated in the art of Tennessee Williams. One of his later plays, a one-act called "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow," actually has a character journeying to the House of Death and demanding to be let in. The Grim Reaper finally answered that knock with the ironic twist of a bottle cap, showing that death is as great an artist as Williams, and just a great a master of black comedy.

Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on march 26, 1911, in the parsonage of his grandfather, the Rev. Walter Edwin Dakin, an Episcopal priest in Columbus, Miss. His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, had married Cornelius Williams on June 2, 1907, in that same parsonage. Williams worked for the Cumberland Telephone Company, and was frequently away from the home the couple initially maintained in Gulfport, Miss. This combined with Cornelius' frequent forays into drinking and womanizing, led to Edwina's return to the parental parsonage in 1909, where she gave birth to her first child, Rose, and where she stayed for the next several years. During this period she saw Cornelius rarely, but often enough to give birth to two other children, Thomas and Dakin (1919). The birth of Dakin (or Walter Dakin) came after the couple had reunited and made a move together to St. Louis, where Cornelius had obtained a managerial position with the International Shoe Company, and the only place where the family would develop any strong roots.

St. Louis would be the city where Tennessee Williams would receive his primary and secondary education. It would be the city where he published his first juvenile efforts at poetry, fiction, and drama. It also would see his funeral and burial in 1983.

Thomas Williams, as he was known before adopting the pen name Tennessee Williams in 1938, attended Eugene Field Elementary School, Ben Blewett Junior High School, University City High School, and Soldan High School. His relationship with his father was bleak at best. Edwina once wrote: "Because Tom preferred to read, or write or to go to the movies rather than play baseball, his father contemptuously called him 'Miss Nancy'". Cornelius proved little better than the boys at school who taunted him with cries of "sissy." Edwina saved her money to purchase a portable Underwood typewriter for Tom. By the age of 13, he was using this machine to turn out little stories and poems for school publications. While still in high school, he submitted a story called "The Vengeance of Nitocris" to Weird Tales magazine, marking his debut as a professional writer.

He graduated from high school in 1929, 53d out of a class of 83. From 1929 to 1932, he attended the University of Missouri at Columbia. His poor grades and family money problems resulted in Cornelius pulling him out of school and putting him to work in a shoe factory in St. Louis. The most important developments of his college years concerned his writing a number of plays performed by the campus English department. Despite these literary efforts, Williams' talents were far from obvious. A classmate remembered: "There was absolutely no indication that Tom would become America's greatest playwright. He was unremarkable in every way, and when he left he was simply doing what many others had to do during the Depression."

For the next three years, in between work at the shoe factory and night classes in typing and shorthand, Williams wrote poems -- a number of which were published in magazines around the country. He also began to write short plays under the influence of Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov and Swedish dramatist August Strindberg. He also became interested in the poetry of Hart Crane, an American poet who committed suicide in 1932 by jumping off a ship between Key West and Havana. Like Walt Whitman, Crane used his own life as material for his art. As a poet, his life became "a usable past" -- and Williams would increasingly turn to his own life and family as the material for his literary work.

Williams' home life was a hotbed of dysfunctionality. Cornelius was increasingly brutal, alcoholic, and promiscuous. Edwina was supportive of young Tom's art, but more and more of a domineering and suffocating influence. Rose, Tom's older sister, was more and more subject to mental instability. Her mental problems led to a number of hospital stays. Finally, in 1937, Rose was given a pre-frontal lobotomy. This decision was mainly made by Edwina. Dakin would later write: "My father was too involved with his drinking and golf-plyaing and poker games to be interested in Rose." One of the main factors propelling Edwina to the decision to have her daughter lobotomized was Rose's accusation that a drunken Cornelius had made sexual advances at her.

Tom would never forgive his mother for her decision regarding his sister. He had returned to the University of Missouri in 1936, and in 1937 had transfered to the University of Iowa. He did not even know about the operation until he returned to St. Louis for a visit months later. The image of the rose, the name "Rose," and characters modeled after Rose became

staples of Williams' later art. From 1937, until her death in 1996, Rose was institutionalized, and whenever asked her age, she would respond, "Twenty-eight."

Aug. 5, 1938 saw Thomas Lanier Williams graduate from the University of Iowa with a bachelor of arts degree in English. Within a few weeks he had journeyed to New Orleans, got work waiting tables, continued writing poems, plays, and short stories, and for the first time began to use the name Tennessee Williams. He would register in the cheap boardinghouses of the French Quarter as "Tennessee Williams, Writer."

His first real break as a playwright came about in 1939 as a result of a lie. He learned that the Group Theatre in New York was sponsoring a play contest. The problem was that the entrants had to be younger than 25 years of age. Williams was 27. On his appliaction he gave his date of birth as March 26, 1914, and sent in four, one-act plays and two longer plays -- "Not About Nightingales" and "Fugitive Kind."

While he did not win first prize, the judges were impressed enough to give him a special award of $100. Moreover, one of the judges sent some of the plays to literary agent Audrey Wood. This woman took on the task of serving as the agent for Tennessee Williams. This was the job she would perform skillfully until 1971, when Williams would fire her in a rage after a theatrical failure. In the more than 30 years she had Tennessee Williams as a client, she was farm more than an agent. She managed his finances, answered his mail, and provided emotional support -- virtually becoming his surrogate mother. She even obtained warm clothing for him when he arrived in New York City in the Fall of 1939.

Audrey Wood arranged for the sale of the option of the one act plays to Hume Cronyn. She also arranged for the sale of the option of a play, "Battle of Angels" to the Theatre Guild. This play was described by Williams as "a mixture of super religiosity and hysterical sexuality co-existing in a central character." It recounts the tale of a sexual triangle involving a poetic drifter, a sexually frustrated wife, and her dying husband. It takes place in a southern small town store operated by the husband and wife. The play opened on Dec. 20, 1940, at the Wilburn Theatre in Boston, with Miriam Hopkins playing the wife. The play ran for two weeks, during which time a member of the Boston City Council and the city police department protested. Largely because of this, the play did not move on to a New York run.

The next two years were lean times for Williams. Audrey Wood managed to place a poem or story here and there for him, but once again he was at times reduced to waiting tables. Finally, in Spring 1943, Wood managed to get Williams a short term contract from Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios for screenplay work. He proved unsuccessful as a screenwriter but during this period he began a play based on his home life called "The Gentleman Caller," which would later be called "The Glass Menagerie." He also wrote a play called "You Touch Me," based on a D.H. Lawrence short story. This play would be performed by the Pasadena Playhouse.

Williams finished "The Glass Menagerie" in the Summer of 1944. On Dec.

26, 1944, the play opened in Chicago at the Civic Theatre with Laurette Taylor playing Amanda Wingfield, a role modeled after Williams' mother. Julie Haydon played Laura Wingfield, a role modeled after Rose. In fact, the epitaph of Rose's tombstone in Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis is the last line from this play: "Blow out your candles, Laura…".

In his later years, Williams came to have an almost paranoid hatred of theater critics, believing that they conspired against him and wanted him to fail. But "The Glass Menagerie" was an example of a play which was truly saved by critics. Claudia Cassidy, critic for the Chicago Daily Tribune, and Ashton Stevens of the Herald American championed the play, attending performances night after night, each day printing new articles urging audiences to attend. Prior to these notices, the producers had been planning to close the play after the second night. Within three weeks, no tickets were available. On March 31, 1945, the play opened at the Playhouse Theatre in New York, and at the end of this performance the cast took 25 curtain calls.

The entire fabric of the Williams family is present in the play. The mother is domineering, the daughter fragile and afflicted with a limp symbolic of Rose's mental problems, and the narrator is a young poet named Tom who works in a shoe factory, and the absent father is actually described as "a telephone man who fell in love with long distance." The play gave Williams financial independence and enabled him to provide lieftime support for his mother. She would no longer be dependent on Cornelius, who saw the play while on business in Chicago and saw no similarity between it and his family.

"The Glass Menagerie" was awarded the prize for best play of the year by the New York Drama Critics Circle, and Williams was given the Sidney Howard Memorial Prize by the Playwrights Company. Even while the play was still in Chicago, Williams was working on the play which would become "A Streetcar Named Desire."

This new play would open on Dec. 3, 1947, at the Barrymore Theatre in New York with Jessica Tandy starring as the faded Southern belle Blanche DuBois, Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski, Kim Hunter as Stella Kowalski, and Karl Malden as Harold Mitchell. The director was Elia Kazan, who would later go on to Hollywood and direct the screen version of "Streetcar" along with 23-year-old Brando, who again played the lead.

Death emerges in this play as an increasingly important peroccupation for Williams. "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, then transfer to one called Cemeteries." -- this is Blanche's first line.

During the rehearsal for this play, Williams announced for the first of many times in his life that he was dying and this would be his last play. For this reason, he said, the script could not be changed because he did not have the energy. Nevertheless, despite his determination to die just before or during the opening of the play, he had enough faith in his helath to book passage on a Dec. 20th ship for Europe for an extended holiday.

The play was even better received than "The Glass Menagerie." The audience stood and applauded a full half hour at the end. While Williams was in Europe on his holiday, he learned that "Streetcar" had won the New York Drama Critics Circle award and the Pulitizer Prize for best play of the year.

The 1950s would be good to Tennessee Williams. On Broadway he turned out hit after hit, with most of them appearing on the Hollywood screen. In 1955, he won a second Pulitzer Prize for "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

However, in the 1960s, Williams began a relentless decline which would eventually end in his death. It was perhaps as a result of his plays, with their shocking themes of violence and sex, no longer standing out as attractions in a decade of war and sexual freedom. He continued to be praised, performed, and awarded honors, but he was no longer the toast of Broadway. Perhaps the signal for this came with the failure of his play "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore." One critic cruelly entitled his review: "Mistuh Williams -- He Dead." Moreover, Williams himself added to the impression that he was in decline with his heavy consumption of alcohol and drugs of various kinds. While he continued to work hard -- rising at 5 a.m. to begin writing, regardless of the follies of the night before -- he could still easily consume three bottles of wine, handfuls of pills, and quarts of coffee during a normal day's work at the typewriter.

The Feb. 25, 1983 death of Tennessee Williams still swirls in controversy. Dakin Williams became convinced soon after he received word of the death that his brother had been murdered. Dakin eventually established a website offering a $50,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the person responsible for his brother's death: "...A strange eerie man who refused to identify himself, entered the lobby of my brother's hotel. He pushed himself past the doorman and desk clerks and ran to the elevator. Before he could be stopped, he entered the elevator, despite demands that he identify himself and {objections that he} could not go up without being announced. Despite these demands, he took the elevator up to the penthouse where Tennessee lived. One half hour later, the stranger emerged and ran from the building."

Some time after this, Williams was found dead. Dakin claims that the autopsy shows that the Visine bottle cap was part of a ruse: "Tennessee did not die from choking on the Visine bottle top, claimed to be in his larynx, and the bottle top was inserted in his mouth after death." The body was not found in bed, but on the floor next to the bed.

The following excerpts from an official report by the chief medical examiner of New York City dated Feb. 25, 1983 describe the scene in the hotel suite when the body was found:

"A bedspread and some sheets and blankets lie on the floor over the left foot by the club chair -- adult white male lying on a green carpeted floor between the club chair by a semi-circular night table with a lamp and a stool in front of the drapes; an attache case and black shoe beneath the club chair -- the body is lying on its right side with the left leg bent -- the right extended at the knee; the left upper extremity at the side and lying

face down; the right arm is entended backward with the forearm bent at the elbow and elbow resting against mattress; the right hand lies above the floor. Beneath the night table is an open vial, two corks from wine bottles also lying beneath the night table."

The official autopsy did highlight some of the marks on the body, which Dakin feels are bruises: "There is pronounced anterior lividity involving the head, the chest and the upper extremities. There are intense Tardieu-like hemorrhages about the face, about the chest and left arm. There is some subconjunctival congestion and hemorrhages as well. The tip of the tongue has a slight pinkish discoloration. The teeth are in good condition. There is lividity present on the medial aspect of the left thigh tending to be anterior and the left leg. There is anterior lividity on the lateral aspect of the right buttocks and blanched areas are noted over the right costal margin, the left knee and the lateral aspect of the right thigh and the right leg in areas in which the body was previously resting."

The cap of the Visine bottle is noted in the autopsy: "The larynx is removed en bloc with the tongue and upon removal an orange, screw-on lid over-cap is lodged in the glottis, displacing the epiglottis anteriorly, with edema present in the left aryepiglottic fold and edema also present in the left aspect of the epiglottis. The trachea is removed en bloc as well as oesophagus for photography of the over-cap ensitu. The oesophagus is removed and the larynx and trachea opened posteriorly with the orange screw on over-cap still in place - there is edema of both aryepiglottic folds. The larynx beneath the epiglottis is unobstructed. Because of the ossifcation of the thyroid cartilage, the thyroid cartilage itself is not opened at this time. Lodged within the orange, screw-on over-cap for nasal or eye medication is some pink granular material (seconal?) measuring 1.8 cm x 0.4 cm; this lies on the inside of the cap directed inferiorly in the glottis; both the epiglottis and the eryepiglottis folds shoe (sic) edema when the cap is removed; there is some abundant mucous just below the glottis. The orange over-cap measures 5/8 inches high; the flat tipped conical top measures 1/4 inch by 1/4 inch."

Dakin Williams contends that someone smothered his brother with a pillow, causing bruises on the neck and chest. This person then allegedly deposited the bottle cap into the throat. Dakin alleges that certain people associated with or employed by his brother were responsible for this act. In 1968, Dakin had Tennessee Williams committed for a time to the Barnes Hosptial in St. Louis, a mental institution. This was in response to a period of extreme drug and alcohol consumption on the part of the playwright. When he came out of this hospital, Tennessee Williams dropped Dakin from his will. The sizable estate was inherited by certain people associated with or employed by Tennessee Williams.

Also in 1968, before he was hospitalized, Tennessee Williams converted to Catholicism with his brother's help. While he was not a churchgoer thereafter, the playwright was still a Catholic and was given a Catholic funeral.
Robert Hines, one of the pallbearers, quoted in a letter a comment by a friend about the religious aspects of the arrangements: "Tom was born and raised an Episcopalian, then later baptized and converted to Catholicism, and is now buried in a Jewish casket!" He goes on to describe the casket:

"It's true -- the casket is oak, beautiful, but it has no handles! It's very heavy and I don't know how we are going to manage it. There are lots of steps and I'm going this afternoon to the cemetery to 'case the joint'".

According to Hines, the press was a concern to Dakin from the beginning: "Dakin has been perfectly lovely to me and my freinds, as well as his wife Joyce -- but has lambasted the press." In press reports immediately after Williams' death, there was much speculation about what the nature of the funeral arrangements would be. Dakin initially looked to the will as a guide: "If I had control over it, I would let them have their big show business funeral in New York and then bring him back to Calvary Cemetery to be buried next to our mother. But he is always quoted as saying he wanted to be cremated, and if that is what is in his will, of course we will abide by his request," Dakin was quoted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in its Feb. 27, 1983 edition.

However, the press had become aware of the fact that an entirely different disposal method had been envisioned: "In his Memoirs published in 1975, he stated that he wanted his body sewn up in a clean, white sack and dropped overboard 12 hours north of Havana, so that 'my bones will rest not far from those of Hart Crane.'" The Post-dispatch later wrote that Williams even stated in a book that a codical to this effect had been added to his will. Neverhteless, no such codical or other instruction pertaining to burial or cremation was ever found in the will.

The services in New York were in the hands of those who inherited his $6 million estate (which as stated above did not include Dakin.) However, the services in St. Louis were in the hands of Dakin.

In New York, visitation was held at the Campbell's Funeral Home at 81st Street and Madison Avenue. On Tuesday, March 1, at 1 p.m., a mass was celebrated at the funeral home by an Episcopal priest, the Rev. Sidney Lanier. Rev. Lanier was a cousin of Williams. Also in New York, a requiem mass was held for Williams at The Church of the Savior, a memorial service was held at the Actors Studio, and a Catholic priest and a Russian Orthodox priest blessed the body at the funeral home. The Orthodox priest was brought in at the behest of the late Lady Maria St. Just, a former actress who had played a role in the management of Williams' affairs in his final year.

Dakin attended the wake in New York on Sunday, Feb. 27 and was upset that the casket was closed. "I was angry to see that the casket was closed. I had requested that it be open and I felt that people who had come all the way to see Tennessee should have been able to see him," the Post - Dispatch wrote. On Thursday, March 3, the body arrived in St. Louis. The body lay in state at the Lupton Funeral Chapel at 7233 Delmar Blvd. in University City on Thursday and Friday evenings. In St. Louis, Dakin saw to it that the casket was opened.

On Saturday at 10 a.m., with more than 1,200 people present, an hour-and-a-half-long funeral mass was celebrated at the St. Louis Cathedral by the Rev. Jerome F. Wilkerson of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in University City. The Rev. Lanier, who had officiated at the service in New York, read a

passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes. Prior to the service, the Rev. Wilkerson spoke to the press about Williams. Wilkerson had met the playwright, as well as his mother Edwina, and then read the "The Glass Menagerie". "I admire him for his great compassion and sensitivity. He led a very painful and very Christian life. He cared about lost, alienated, little people," the Post-dispatch quoted him as saying.

Wilkerson expressed similar sentiments in his homily at the Funeral mass: "The tragedy of Tennessee seems to be that the revelatory sword of suffering that pierced his heart seemed to be so much more therapeutic to to others than to himself. He would seem to have remained all of his life among the walking wounded…he did a lot of dying and apparently had little difficulty in 'hating his life in this world.'"

Wilkerson noted that the universality of Williams' work was indicated in the fact that on the day of the funeral, three of his plays were playing in Moscow. Quoting from the deceased, he said: "Death is a moment. Life is many of them. ("The Milk Train Doesn't Stop here Anymore")…Nothing human disgusts me -- unless its unkind or violent…("The Night of the Iguana")…I have always depended on the kindness of strangers (Blanche DuBois' final line in "A Streetcar Named Desire")…Mornings, I love them so much -- they are triumph over night (from Williams' Memoirs.)

As soon as the casket had arrived at the church, rain began falling. The rain continued throughout the funeral, and during the long funeral procession through neighborhoods Tennessee had grown up in, and at the graveside until the burial was over. True to Dakin's wishes, the body was buried in Calvary Cemetery, in a space next to that of his mother (who had died on June 1, 1980.) In 1996, Rose was buried in an adjacent space. Dakin was also pleased that Tennessee would be buried near the famed missionary Dr. Tom Dooley: "He also will be buried near Tom Dooley, so we're in a good neighborhood. and we know that in St. Louis, it's important to be in a good neighborhood," Dakin told the Post-Dispatch. General William Tecumsah Sherman is also buried in the same cemetery.

On March 8, 1983, at 8 p.m., the marquees of 20 theaters on Broadway darkened for one minute in memory of Williams. On March 26, in memory of what would have been his 72nd birthday, a special public ceremony was held in the Shubert Theatre in New York. Some 1,500 people filled the house. Lines had begun forming at 7 a.m. Maureen Stapleton, a longtime friend of Williams, commented to the crowd: "I think Tenn would be glad to know that he had a full house." jessica Tandy performed a speech by Blanche DuBois from "A Streetcar Named Desire." Geraldine Fitzgerald sang Williams' favorite song, "Danny Boy." At the end of the program, the crowd was held spellbound by a recording of Williams reading the opening monologue of the "The Glass Menagerie": "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances…"

Eventually, at Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis, a tall, pink granite monument was installed for Tennessee Williams. The granite itself is of Tennessee granite. On the side facing the roadway is:

"Tennessee Williams, 1911-1983, Poet Playwright

The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks -- Camino Real"

"Camino Real" is a Williams play from 1953. On the side facing the hill is:

"Thomas Lanier Williams, March 26, 1911 - February 25, 1983"

Also on the hillside of the monument is a rose and an Orthodox cross, which would seem to be the choice of Lady Maria St. Just, who selected the stone, and was in charge of many of Williams' affairs in the final stage of his life. The rose reflects Williams' sister, Rose. The public and private, the famous and family natures of the playwright, are embodied by this double-sided monument.

[Published in American Funeral Director magazine, May & June, 1998. Special thanks to Prof. Richard Vowles, retired professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for his help in writing this article]

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Hopeless Romantic

"Hopeless Romantic" was originally performed on August 14, 2010 at Center Stage Theater in Santa Barbara, California as part of their 20th anniversary celebration. This two-character stage play was filmed that fall and broadcast on PBS on December 21, 2010.

Saturday, August 14, 2010

THEODORE J. SENNES PRESENTS

HOPELESS ROMANTIC

A New Play by STEVEN KUNES
Starring Edward Giron & Meredith McMinn

It's been many years since Michael Hanley published a novel. But *Hopeless Romantic* is finally here and Beth Summerland, a life-long fan, has rushed to purchase a book. As Beth sits in the waiting area of the Santa Barbara Airport and begins to read, who is seated just a few feet away but the author himself. She's imagined this moment her entire life. Should Beth speak to him? What will she say?

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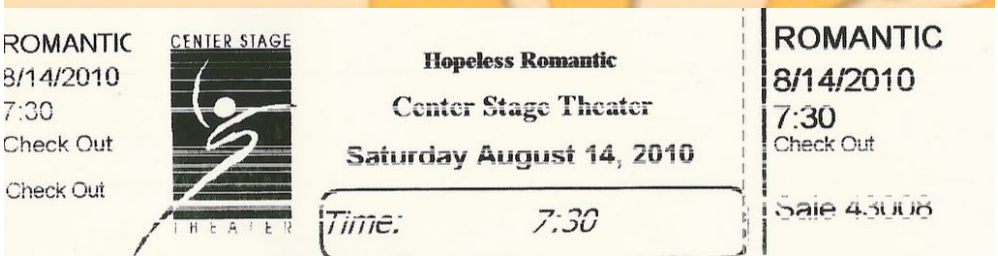


City of Santa Barbara

LETTER of RECOGNITION

Steven Kunes

Center Stage Theater's 20th Anniversary Celebration
"Hopeless Romantic"

June 16, 2010

WHEREAS, *the Center Stage Theater acknowledges community members who show great leadership in aiding the community, as well as promoting the arts in Santa Barbara; and*

WHEREAS, Steven Kunes *is a local and exemplary member of the literary community; his outstanding talent has gained him recognition throughout the entire world. His writing on a wide variety of films and television shows has earned him prestigious awards from almost every entertainment industry-governing organization, both in the United States and abroad; and*

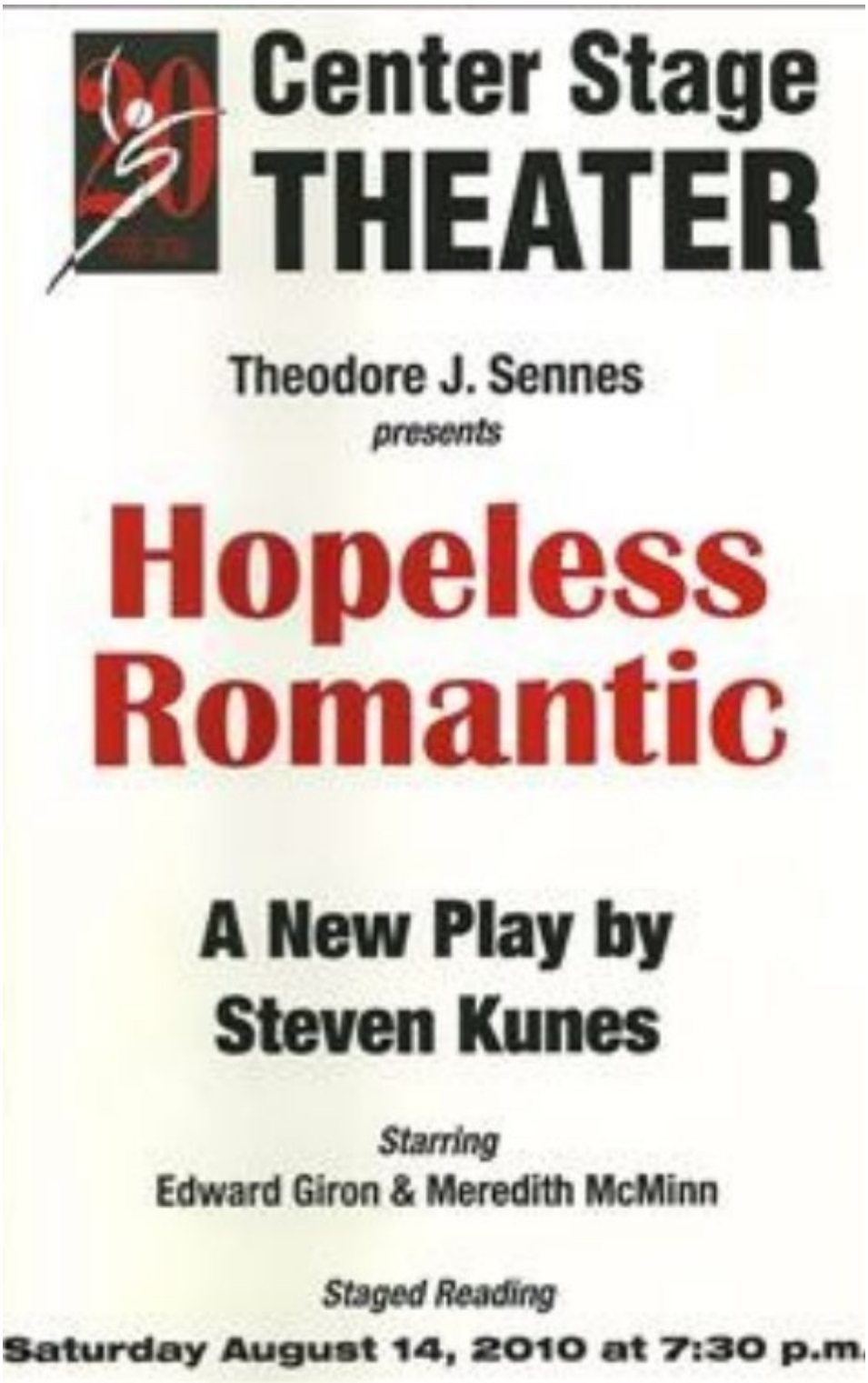
WHEREAS, Steven Kunes *has always participated in and has supported the arts, working in the motion picture industry for the past three decades. He has demonstrated enormous talent in the areas of both comedy and drama; and*

WHEREAS, *as an active collaborator with several local non-profit organizations,* ***Steven Kunes*** *exudes remarkable qualities of true citizenship. His work with such local non-profits as Families ACT!, the Boys & Girls Club Writing Program, the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, and the Santa Barbara International Film Festival serves as an outstanding example for all of those in the Santa Barbara community.*

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Helene Schneider, *by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Santa Barbara, California, do hereby honor and recognize* ***Steven Kunes*** *for imparting his vision, steady leadership and dedication to our community.*

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, *I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Official Seal of the City of Santa Barbara, California, to be affixed to this on the 16th day of June, 2010.*

Helene Schneider
Mayor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Publicity

Los Angeles Times

Steven Kunes

Interviews

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Santa Barbara Independent(USA)	4 January 2007, Vol. 21, Iss. 051, pg. 41, by: Steven Kunes, "Love Thyself: A Lesson From 'The Ugly Duckling'"
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Malibu Surfside News(USA)	6 April 2006, pg. 15, by: Steven Kunes, The Not-So-Ugly Duckling"
Los Angeles Times (USA)	31 July 2005, pg. A-3, by: Hilda Hodges,"Screenwriter Steven Kunes Receives Prestigious Laura Pels Humanitarian Award"
Los Angeles Times (USA)	16 July 2005, pg. C-11, by: Anna Schwaderer,"Catch Me If You Can Screenwriter Steven Kunes Wants To Be Caught!"
Daily Variety(USA)	20 May 1992, pg. 1, by: Matt Rothman,"First Comes Love" by "Rain Man" screenwriter Steven Kunes sells to newcomer Westport Film Partners for $1.2 million"

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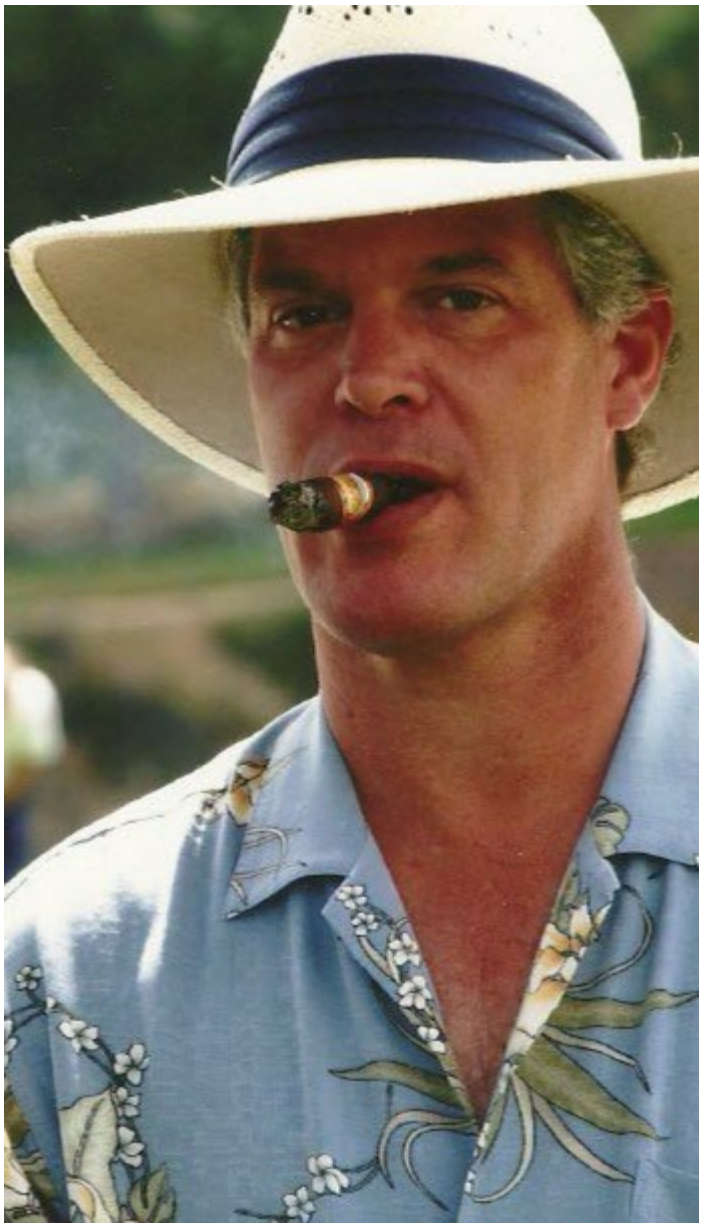

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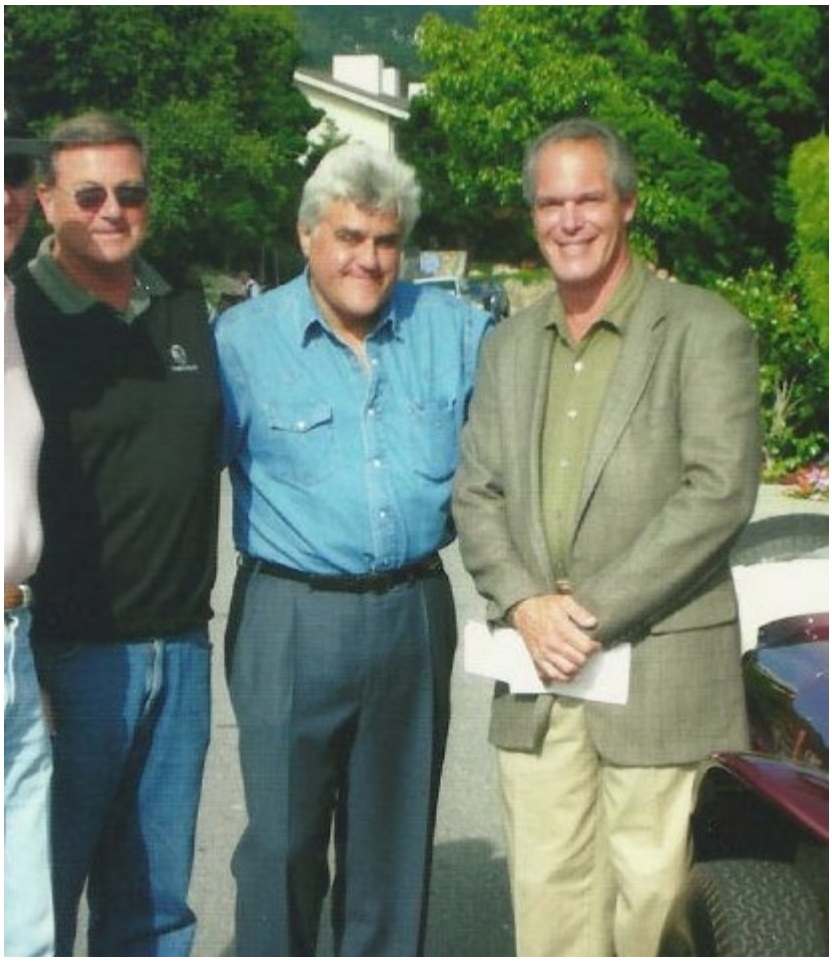

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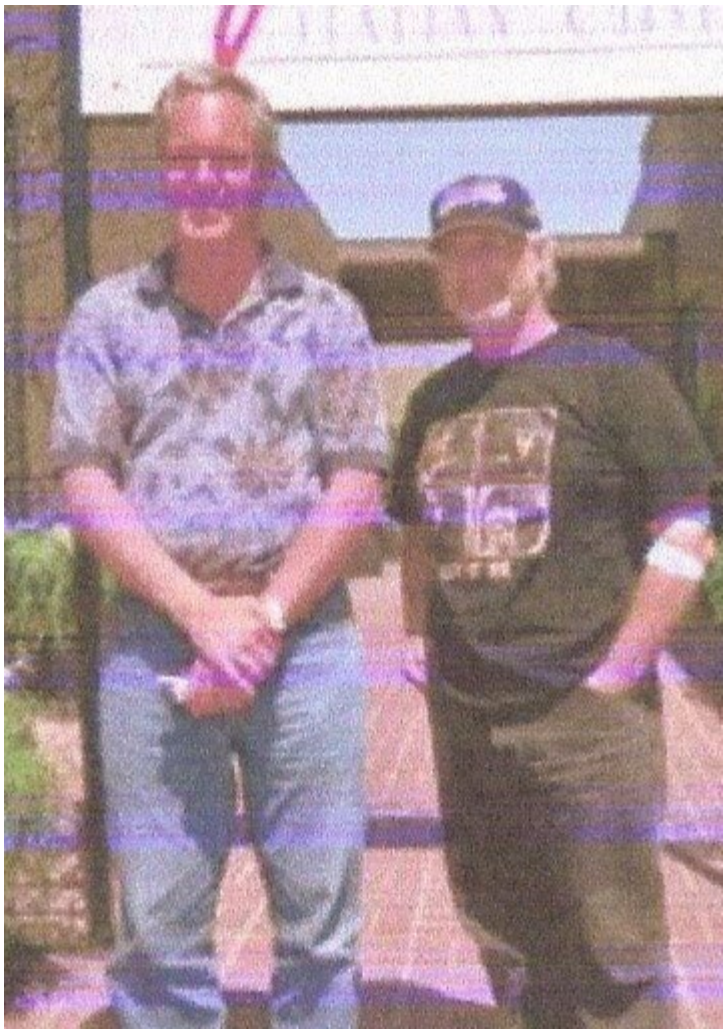

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Steven Kunes

Author, Screenwriter, Playwright, Executive Producer

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- Tennessee Williams Typewriter
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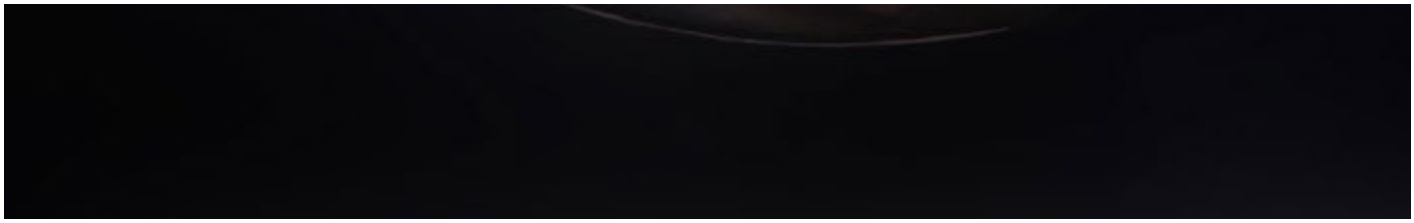
UNCLE JERRY
TO WIN
STEVEN KUNES



FOUR ON
THE FLOOR
HOPELESS ROMANTIC
CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS
FOUR PLAYS
CAPTAIN OF A LOST SHIP
THEN AGAIN
STEVEN KUNES

Pick Six

Six Screenplays

Steven Kunes

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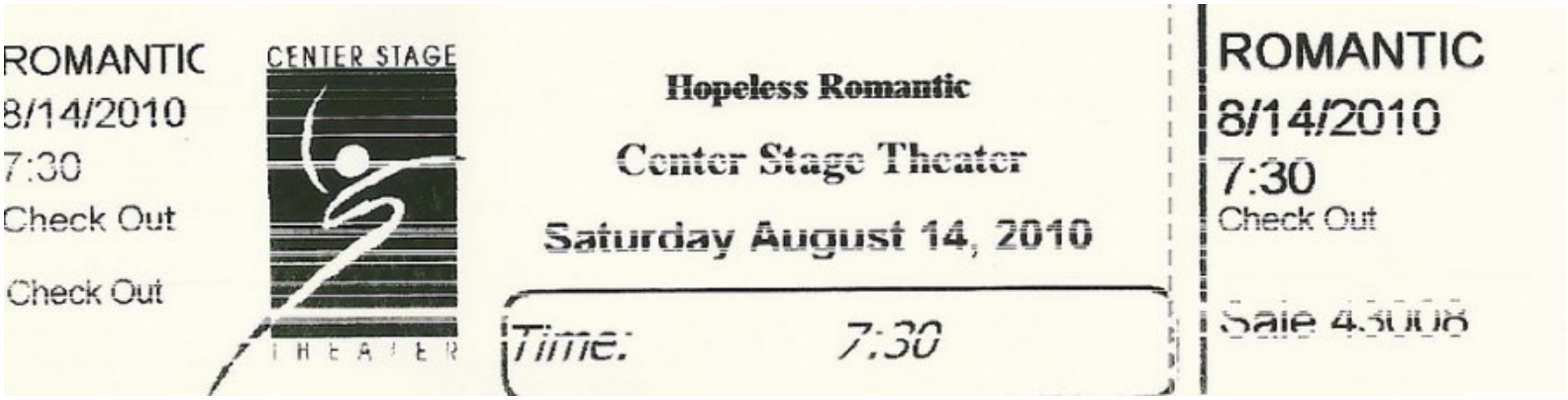
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THEATER
Hopeless Romantic
Center Stage Theater
Saturday August 14, 2010
Time: 7:30
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City of Santa Barbara

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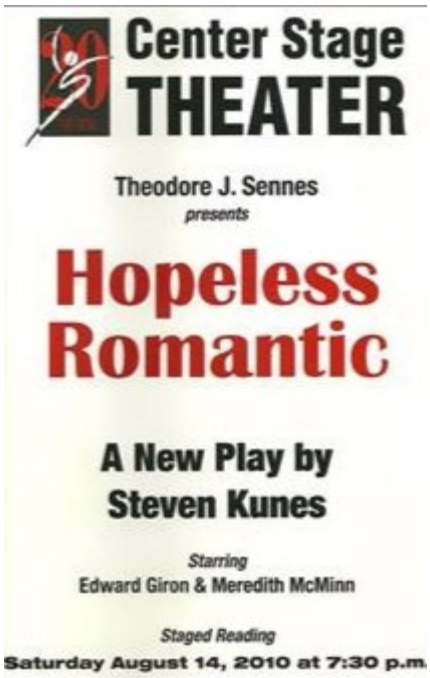
Mayor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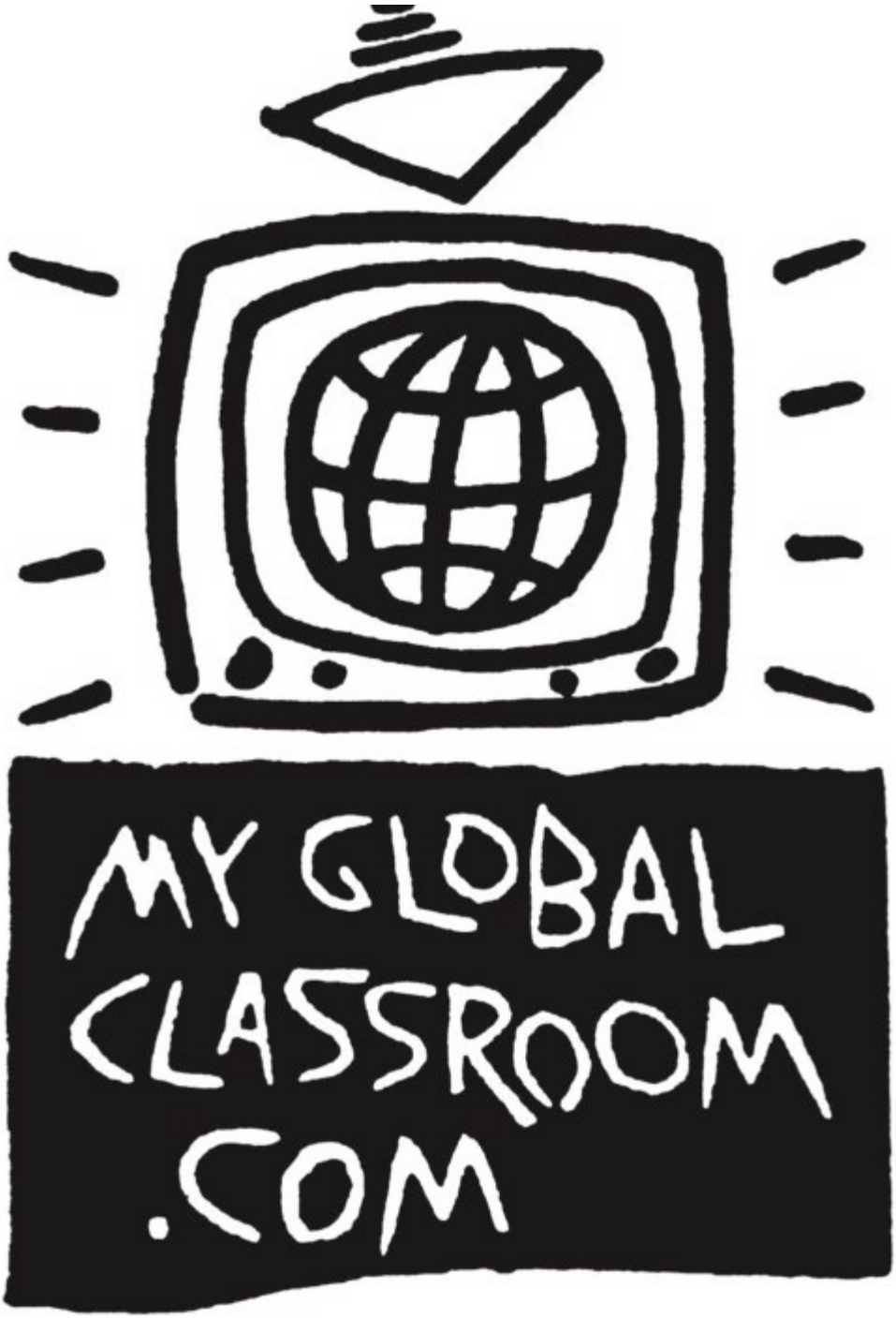
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